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Navy Preventive Medicine's Role in Supporting Continuing Promise 2011

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(Rivas, Nicaragua): Air Force Capt. Tracy Brannock, Max Gyllenskog, Latter-day Saints Charity and Cmdr. Mark Riddle visit a local artisan cheese factory in Rivas, Nicaragua during Continuing Promise 2011.

By Cmdr. Mark S. Riddle.

Continuing Promise is an annual humanitarian civic affairs deployment to the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) area of responsibility providing medical, dental, veterinary, engineering and subject matter expert exchanges (SMEEs) with the goal of demonstrating dedication and commitment to our friends in the Caribbean, Central and South America.

The Continuing Promise mission provides a unique training opportunity to learn from partner nations and civilian experts and prepare for any

future foreign disaster response efforts in this region.

In support of this deployment, Lt. Andrea McCoy and I were augmented to the Preventive Medicine Department (PMD) from the Naval Medical Research Center (NMRC) in Silver Spring Md. As part of the PMD we are with an interdisciplinary group of professionals from public health, preventive medicine, industrial hygiene, and bio-environmental engineering.

As true to other departments on this mission, the joint composition of Navy, Air Force and civilian NGO personnel provides a richness of experience, skill sets and opportunities to learn and share from each other.

Such deployments also provide unique opportunities to better understand disease threats and execute preventive medicine actions. Using our unique background as researchers in the NMRC Enteric Diseases Department and our capabilities in epidemiology, Lt. McCoy and I stood up an enhanced disease and non-battle injury and travelers' diarrhea surveillance.

Through weekly self-report surveys and collection of specimens from patients with acute illnesses, the PMD was able to provide leadership with actionable information on disease incidence, etiology, impact, and targeted mitigation strategies. Not unexpectedly during

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these types of deployments, diarrheal and respiratory diseases are quite common and require ongoing public health attention.

The PMD plays a vital role in protecting the health of the nearly 900-member joint, multinational, NGO and civil service mariner staff on the Comfort ensuring we all can individually be most effective in our performance. The PMD's efforts in improving water and sanitation and information sharing with host nation communities in Peru and Colombia will hopefully continue to improve the lives of those inhabitants for years to come.

The PMD mission is to preserve the health of the mission force through population-based methods of disease and injury avoidance, and provide host nations with information and assistance in preserving and improving the health of their populations.

We accomplish this through such tasks as helping to establish local policy, health education for shipboard and host nation populations, SMEE's with local health officials, continuing education to healthcare professionals, and augmentation of Seabee construction teams with local water and sanitation projects.

The Continuing Promise 2011 mission has reached its halfway mark with future missions including Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica and finishing off in Haiti before returning to Baltimore in September. Country after country, the mission has been undoubtedly successful thus far in people helping people and building relationships. The PMD has and continues to play an important role in the Navy Hospital ship USNS Comfort Team's success.

After this deployment we will return to NMRC, where we work with other researchers in the Infectious Diseases Directorate conducting research on diseases that are considered to be significant threats to our deployed sailors, Marines, soldiers, and airmen.

Significant threats are those that have the potential to incapacitate a large number of deployed forces over a short time period, thus hindering the ability of warfighters to accomplish their mission.

Cmdr. Mark Riddle is a researcher in enteric disease research at the Naval Medical Research Center (NMRC) in Silver Spring, Md. He is currently deployed on the Navy hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) in Latin and South America.

This article originally appeared on July 18, 2011, as part of the [DoDLive](#) Medical Monday series.

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